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C O N F I D E N T I A L MANILA 001128

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SUBJECT: PHILIPPINE FOREIGN SECRETARY ON NORTH KOREA,
BURMA, GSP PETITIONS

REF: A. MANILA 1112

[B.](#) MANILA 1081

[C.](#) MANILA 1065

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[11.](#) (C) SUMMARY: In a free-ranging private discussion over breakfast May 28, Philippine Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo underscored to the Ambassador the gravity with which his government views recent provocative moves by North Korea, and he indicated that Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo intends to raise the issue during her upcoming travel to South Korea and Russia. He reiterated Arroyo's concern over the treatment of imprisoned Burmese pro-democracy activist Aung San Suu Kyi, and characterized President Arroyo's interest in the matter as "passionate." Romulo echoed previously expressed desires for a meeting between Arroyo and President Obama, and remarked on the utility of his meeting with Secretary Clinton prior to her possible participation in ASEAN meetings in July. The Foreign Secretary was visibly worried over pending Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) petitions against the Philippines, and committed to facilitating the early visit of an International Labor Organization (ILO) team. He expressed unease at upcoming hearings on the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) in the Philippine Senate, and closed the meeting by offering assurances that every possible precaution would be taken to ensure the safety of former police officers being extradited to the Philippines in connection with a high-profile 2000 murder case. END SUMMARY.

North Korean Provocations Troubling

[12.](#) (C) The conversation opened with discussion of North Korea's May 25 nuclear test, which the Philippines strongly condemned in terms similar to those of the United States (reftel A). The Foreign Secretary outlined that President Arroyo intends to raise the issue again during her travel later this week to Seoul, as well as with Russian authorities during her onward travel to that country. Romulo opined that China had a clear role to play in influencing the DPRK to become a more responsible member of the international community, and that to that end it was important to enlist greater engagement on their part.

President Arroyo "Passionate" about Aung San Suu Kyi

[13.](#) (C) Turning to the subject of Burma, Foreign Secretary Romulo underscored President Arroyo's deep concern over the well-being of imprisoned opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, intimating that Arroyo was "passionate" on the subject (reftels B, C). Romulo expressed his approval of the extensive coverage that events in Burma garnered in the often-insular Philippine media, where editorials in leading

dailies continue to concentrate on Suu Kyi's plight. He averred that the Philippine people viewed as abhorrent the Burmese junta's treatment of Suu Kyi and the Burmese people.

Keen Desire for Face-to-Face Meetings

¶4. (C) The Foreign Secretary alluded once again to President Arroyo's strong desire for a face-to-face meeting with President Obama in the Oval Office, and imparted that although his government had provided a list of preferred dates (i.e., June through mid-July), Malacanang remained flexible. Foreign Secretary Romulo also repeated his own wish for a Washington meeting with Secretary Clinton, and explained that in the lead-up to Secretary Clinton's possible participation at an ASEAN foreign ministers meeting later this summer, such a face-to-face private discussion would offer a unique opportunity to coordinate U.S.-Philippine strategy on Burma, North Korea, and emerging regional issues such as expanded cooperation on the environment. In discussing high-level visits, Romulo also conveyed President Arroyo's regret at being unable to meet Defense Secretary Gates during his May 31 - June 1 visit, together with Arroyo's expressed hope that Gates' visit would prove highly productive to bilateral relations.

GSP Petitions Taken Very Seriously

¶5. (C) The Foreign Secretary frankly acknowledged the gravity of petitions seeking to strip the Philippines of its Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) benefits, and outlined that in a May 27 conversation with Philippine Labor Secretary Marianito Roque, he had impressed on Roque the crucial importance of facilitating an early visit by a team of ILO inspectors. The Ambassador stressed that in its response to GSP petitions, the opportunity was at hand for the Philippines to back -- with concrete and decisive actions -- its strong advocacy for the UN and its affiliated bodies. The Foreign Secretary expressed his wholehearted concurrence.

Worries Over VFA Hearings in Senate

¶6. (C) Touching on upcoming hearings in the Philippine Senate over possible renegotiation or abrogation of the U.S.-Philippine Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA), Romulo expressed fears that in the highly charged political environment already prevailing in the lead-up to 2010 national elections, dialogue regarding the VFA would likely take on an adversarial and accusatory tone. The Foreign Secretary pointed to the example of the previous day's anti-VFA protest, which had drawn some 600 demonstrators. He went on to reflect on the increasing sophistication of leftist organizations orchestrating opposition to the VFA, who in this case had provided a popular music concert in a centrally located park in order to attract a larger crowd. Romulo thanked the Ambassador for the information provided by the Embassy on benefits derived by the Philippines from the VFA, and welcomed any additional help the Embassy can provide in preparation for his appearance before the Senate. He emphasized the need for vigilance over unforeseen difficulties as the hearings approached.

Safety Paramount for Those Extradited

¶7. (C) Turning to the subject of the imminent extradition to the Philippines of former police superintendent Cezar Mancao, who is wanted in connection with a high-profile double murder case from 2000, the Ambassador reemphasized the critical importance of ensuring the safety and well-being of Mancao and others who may be extradited in connection with the case. The Ambassador went on to opine that unindicted persons potentially connected to the murders may not wish for Mancao and others to testify, and suggested that it would be prudent under such circumstances not to divulge details of the suspects' movements or location after their arrival in the

Philippines. Any untoward treatment of Mancao or others could have a profoundly negative impact on bilateral law enforcement cooperation. The Foreign Secretary agreed without reservation, and promised to stress to all relevant GRP agencies the importance of taking every possible precaution.

KENNEY